

## A Visit with Natalie Goodrich

BY DAVID A. MITTELL, JR.

If it could be proven, one might say Since it can't, we'll only say she born in Malden on Aug. 5, 1921, to parents were Ethel and Russell the Soules who first settled Powder



that Natalie Goodrich was a born actress. became a great actress – and was actually one of Duxbury's original families. Her Soule. Russell was the tenth generation of Point.

When Natalie's grandfather died, the family moved year-round to the Powder Point homestead – which, with remunerative work in Duxbury scarce during the Depression, had temporarily been turned into a summer place. But as is the case with so many others, Duxbury eventually drew the family home for good. Natalie graduated from Duxbury High School in 1939, then entered Curry College when it was still located in Boston. By and by she fell in love with James N. Henry II, a law student at Boston University. World War II was on, and before he could graduate, he enlisted in the Navy Air Force. As soon as he received his wings, the couple was married in Atlanta. Their son James (Jay, as I remember him) followed. After just a year and a half of marriage Mr. Henry died of cancer. Natalie returned to Duxbury with her infant son. She has been a fixture of Duxbury's arts, theatre, charity and social life for more than 70 years. In Duxbury, Natalie renewed her friendship with Benjamin (Bud) Goodrich, Jr., son of the owner, and later himself the owner, of Goodrich Lumber Company on St. George Street. They were married in 1949. Bud adopted James and they had two children of their own, Nina and Benjamin III. They were married for 54 years.

Theatre was there at the start. Natalie did two summers of plays with Al Moritz and a group of players from New York City. The theatre was the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) Hall on Washington Street. The GAR had been a politically and socially potent association of Northern Civil War Veterans. Duxbury had many – enough for its own hall.

By the 1940s most of these men had died, and the hall – today a private home – was not in good repair. There was a stage of sorts, but no way to get from "stage right" to "stage left" behind the scenes except through a bathroom, the entering of which during a performance could be an adventure, and not only for the actor.

From Al Moritz's troupe Natalie became a charter member of the Bay Players. In the 1950s, the Players' performances were at the great barn at Bay Farm (hence, the name). Natalie performed many times with the late Clipper founder Bobbi Cutler – also a talented actress. Among Natalie's favorite roles were ones in "Oklahoma," "A Glass Menagerie," "A Lion in Winter," and "My Fair Lady." Natalie was at center stage for 28 years. The Bay Players continue to perform at First Church, though (unfortunately) the Bay Farm barn did not survive.

In her current apartment on South Street, Natalie speaks with fondness for her many friends and with humility about herself. She speaks of "rough edges" that were softened by the late Marie Fox and by her childhood friend of more than 80 years, Anne Flannery Sanders.

Natalie is a lifelong gardener and flower arranger. In recent years, she has faithfully delivered meals on wheels for the Senior Center. As we are talking, her son Ben III and his wife Cheryl drop by. I don't think Ben and I have ever met. But in talking about Goodrich's and the fire that took most of the original building, I feel I've known him all my life. Our late fathers were the best of friends. Sometimes I regret ever leaving this town.

As to his mother's "rough edges," I seem to have missed them. Natalie Goodrich has always been an indomitable soul with a flair for the dramatic. But in the friendships she will always treasure she seems to have given as good as she has gotten. This visit was a great privilege.